

critical digest

Vol. IV No. 23

February 4, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Dickens Readings-Golden, 2/4/52. S. Hurok presents Emlyn Williams as Charles Dickens giving a performance of readings from the famous novels and stories. Limited run engagement...Collector's Item-Booth, 2/8/52. Roger Clark and Lloyd Isler present a new comedy by Lillian Day and Alfred Golden. Cast features Allyn Joslyn, Erik Rhodes, Rene Paul and Louis Sorin.

Digests of Current Reviews - more inside

Come of Age-City Center, 1/23/52. Final production of New York City Theatre Company's winter semester promises to be the most controversial play of the season, just as the original 1934 production was the most controversial of that season. Weekly reviewers held widely diverse views of the Guthrie McClintic staged revival starring Judith Anderson in her original role. Admirers of current version include Francis, Billboard; Morehouse, World Telegram and Sun; and WCBS Bill Leonard. Francis called it merely an interesting revival, though he did wonder what it all had to do with poet Thomas Chatterton. Morehouse raved, tabbing it a beautifully acted and staged production of an affecting and tremulous play. He thought Marian Seldes was especially fine. Leonard admitted he was apologizing for his "pro" review, there was no logical reason, he just liked it. Cue, Time and Variety appraisers marked both play and its diehard followers off as pretentious. Time man compared it to old time trashy silent movie, while Hobe, Variety, understated his case by remarking it was no Pal Joey. Most found Richard Addinsell's music better than Clemence Dane's verse. Even "pro" reviews noted that latter was on the trite side. Views differed widely on merits of supporting cast.

Pal Joey-Broadhurst, 1/3/52. Add two more "pro" reviews to file of Rodgers and Hart revival, produced by Styne, Key and Farrell. Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, thought production starring Vivienne Segal in her original role was brilliant, and much more than characters in plot deserve. Marshall, Nation, concurred, but doubted if Harold Lang was right for the lead role. Though he tries hard he never loses the air of the male ingenue, she commented. Critic is afraid that the real Pal Joey would look upon this impersonation with a quizzical and irreverent eye.

First 7:00 P.M. Curtain SRO

South Pacific first Monday night 7:00 PM curtain experiment proved a success, playgoers and drama reporters agree. In spite of very bad weather the Majestic was sold out, with 30 standing. Many reported that they came only because of the early curtain time which got them out of the theatre before 10:00 PM. Cast and crew also enjoyed early curtain, Morehouse, WT&S, reported in his Page One story. Co-producer Richard Rodgers suggested to his colleagues that if it goes over one night a week, everybody ought to try it. Zolotow, Times, discovered a trio of ticket brokers who didn't think much of the early curtain idea. While Allison, Herald Tribune, reported that Paul Henkel, Society of Restaurateurs president, feared a general 7:00 PM curtain would cause a great drop of patronage in restaurants. Survey of producers by Sylvester, News, showed that probably only shows doing badly would resort to early time. London Observer critic, Ivor Brown, recently complained that 7:30 curtain was inconvenient, and should be changed to 6:30, so playgoers can sup by 8:00 PM.

News & Notes

Gibbs, New Yorker, obtained leave of absence to finish his new script...S.Hurok plans to bring Old Vic to NY next season...Desire Under the Elms to run indefinitely at ANTA playhouse, other plays to be moved.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32.

None: 10-14-21-26-27. So-So: 31.

BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51

Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-24-25-27-28.

None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-26-29-30-31-32-33.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23.

THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51

Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-21-22-26-31-32.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51

Con: 2-6-15-16-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-22-26-28-29-32.

GIGI-11/24/51

Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33.

None: 14-22-23-31.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

Con: 26. None: 10-21.

I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51

Con: 3-5-7-12-27-28. So-So: 1. None: 10-13-14-18-21-22-

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

Con: 26. None: 10-22-24.

26-31.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.

PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51

Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-22-27-28-31-32.

PAL JOEY-1/3/52

Con: 27. None: 12-13-14-17-21-22-24-25-26-28-31-32.

POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51

Con: Con: 8-16-26-27-33. None: 7-11-21-22-23-31.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51

Con: 1-7-16-18-21-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17-22.

THE SHRIKE-1/15/52

Con: 8-27. None: 12-13-14-16-17-21-22-24-26-28-31-32.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-21-24-26-27-28.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 3. None: 10-21-22.

TOP BANANA-11/1/51

Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-16-22-26-28-31-32.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-32.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Shows that closed include Saint Joan, Anna Christie...Come of Age run extended one week at City Center...Sunday NY News features "Ticket Buyers Guide" chart showing tickets available at box offices...John Mason Brown, SRL, to be profiled in New Yorker...Richard Davis, Milwaukee Journal, recuperating from major surgery...Actors Fund to start out of town collection campaign in Milwaukee and Cincinnati...Three man arbitration board named to settle Darkness At Noon dispute...Yul Brynner, The King and I, in Nassau trying to clear up cough, with Leonard Graves subbing...Barbara Baxley signed as Julie Harris understudy in I Am A Camera...London Palladium revue to be imported by Lou Walters...NY Camera Club, 121 West 68th Street, showing "Theatre Personalities" exhibit...UNESCO and Theatre panel at Hunter heard Marc Connelly, Sawyer Falk, and Rosamond Gilder...Saint Joan tour with Jennifer Jones cancelled...Boston University Rodgers & Hammerstein scholarship awarded to Ralph Russell, Jr...Equity bought house at 13 East 67th Street.

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' Green Room Department '
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THEATRE MANNERS...New Year's resolutions offered by "Stage" apply to U.S. playgoers as well as British. Trade paper aimed gripes at those who wait for important scenes to arrive late, those who applaud final curtain standing up, and those who don't have ticket and price data before getting to ticket window.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Serious drama is now at a low ebb because life is too troubled for playgoers to seek more misery, surmises Cahn, Host...WABC Leon Pearson would like an American playwright to turn out a script on the American Negro as moving as Alan Paton's "Cry the Beloved Country"...Desire Under the Elms isn't an American classic to Morgan, Post, it's the worst play he has seen in years.

ACTOR PANIC...Firing of Roger Bico for "failing to improve his enunciation" in his South Pacific role could mean panic in American theatre, comments Phillips, WT&S. It has been clear for a long time that most performers are terrific enthusiasts of the art of pantomime. Only the English actors and a few American actors seem to think the audience would like to know what is going on.

MAIL BAG...Producers, managers and agents were urged by Sylvester, News, to aid Cpl. Gordon Lyons, 2500th Medical Squadron Special Services, Mitchel Air Force Base, Long Island, New York. Garden City 3-4000. Ext. 72105. He needs theatre, radio TV or movie tickets to entertain Korean war veterans...

WRITERS PRO & CON...Watts, Post, admitting that he does not usually praise the work of his colleagues, noted that he vastly enjoyed devastating panning of Come of Age by Kerr, Herald Tribune...Newspaper reporters, for some unknown reason, unfairly label many shoplifters members of show business, without looking into the background at all, complains Burr, Playbill. Example provided by NYU instructor showed that a local suburban paper tagged a shoplifter "ex-actress" though record books showed she appeared in no phase of show business.

POETIC RETORT...Shipley, New Leader, penned answer to press agent Tom Weatherly's "Lines for the Legitimate": The stage is in a slump all right, but the cure's not plain at all: Entertainment, many things can give -- Walk Down the Gay White Way -- To Live the theatre must enthrall.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Gertie- Plymouth 1/30/52. Herman Shumlin's third English import of the season starring British star Glynis Johns was panned by majority of the daily critics. Enid Bagnold's script didn't interest any of them, though Journal American, LI Press, and Women's Wear reviewers thought the evening with the Englishwoman wasn't wasted. Many blamed producer-director Shumlin for not aiding the cause. Supporting cast headed by Polly Rowles, Patricia Wheel and Albert Dekker were mildly praised by most for doing as well as expected. But Chapman, News, panned all in supporting cast except Rowles for acting as if they weren't ready for an actual performance. Atkinson, Times, thought play proved that British are solid, admirable people. He also complained about the hard on the eyes wall paper in the William and Jean Eckhart sets, though most praised sets. Kerr, Herald Tribune, blamed author for lack of theatrical vigor. McClain, Journal American, admitted that he believed at one point most of the first nighters were wondering if they should remain and be bored or if they should go out and be frozen instead. Though he thought play grew in interest, it still was no great shakes. Several noted that script contained 10 to 15 minutes of good comedy, but that's all.

' Meet U.S. First Actor - John Durang '

An all around theatre man is the best way to describe John Durang, first native born American actor. During his career he was an actor, dancer, mime, property man, choreographer, singer, tight rope walker, acrobat, puppeteer, circus clown, author, manager and star. His children were instrumental in the writing of the national anthem. Theatre authorities William Dunlap and George Odell agree that Durang, born in Lancaster, Pa on January 6, 1768, was the sole American born member of the "Old American Company." Durang is to be honored by a permanent "Theatre Hall of Fame" established at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa.

Theatre in America was at a standstill from 1774 to 1784. The First Continental Congress in 1774 passed a resolution banning all public amusements. Acting companies, composed of Englishmen, left the country. Lewis Hallam, one of the most popular managers, returned in 1784 to open his first "lecture" at the Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia. Seventeen year old John Durang was hired by the company as stage hand, property man and assistant in the shadow plays. At the first Philadelphia performances he was featured in a "peasant dance." In New York, where the company played at the John Street Theatre, anti-British feeling was strong until the company headed by Hallam and John Henry wisely changed its name to the "Old American Company." Durang, as the only "American" was popular, and for a long time was the only person mentioned in the theatre's newspaper advertisements.

"Durang's Hornpipe," composed by a dwarf named Hoffmaster, is probably the originator of the modern tap dance. Danced between the acts of the short comedies, it was a popular favorite. Durang also took part in the sketches. After his first year in New York, he and his sister Cathrine, also a member of "Old American Company" staged puppet shows in their home in Philadelphia, in spite of Pennsylvania's strict anti-theatre laws. Playbills show wide variety of parts played by Durang, in addition to his dancing. He played the first "Friday" in "Robinson Crusoe," as well as hundreds of other parts. From Sadler Welles star Alexander Placide he learned to walk a tight rope. In 1790 the papers advertised that Durang would dance his hornpipe on 13 eggs, blindfolded, without breaking one. Just before the "Old American Company" folded after a near starving summer season at Newport, R.I. Durang played in the first American opera, "Tammany."

Thanks to his theatre training, Durang was able to get a job with Rickett's circus in Philadelphia as a clown and acrobat. Later he staged original pantomimes and ballets for the circus. His first production in 1796 was "Country Frolic." After the circus was destroyed by fire he designed scenery and wrote sketches for several producers. His first try at producing was in 1800 when he ran a two month season at Southwark Theatre. He also joined the Chestnut Street Stock Company of Philadelphia, where he remained many years producing ballets and playing roles. In 1807 Hallam let him use the Southwark rent free. This was his first chance at playing leads. Each summer he and his company, which was composed in large part by members of his family, went on a tour of nearby towns playing in inns at Lancaster, Harrisburg and York. Durang retired from the theatre in 1819 and died three years later from asthma.

Durang's sons played a part in the writing of the national anthem. Charles was a member of the army patrol that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the poem "The Star Spangled Banner." While Ferdinand was the young actor who induced Key to set his poem to the old English drinking song "Anacreon in Heaven." Edward Durang, a direct descendant, was a theatre designer responsible for many Pennsylvania playhouses.

